



THE IST INITIATIVE IN VIRGINIA

*“Training and more training... presenting... coaching...
intervening... There are many pieces to the IST Initiative in
Virginia to build exemplary Instructional Support Teams for
schools to emulate.”*

Dr. Todd Gravois
IST Consultant

A decorative graphic in the bottom left corner consisting of a vertical blue arrow pointing up and a horizontal green arrow pointing right, intersecting at their tails.

Virginia Department of Education
2004

BACKGROUND

In December 1999 the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) began developing model Instructional Support Team (IST) sites across Virginia. The goal of an IST is to enhance, improve, and increase student and staff performance. To achieve these goals, the IST provides two interrelated and complimentary services: student intervention and professional development. Examples of these services include the following:



Student Intervention

- assessment
- problem identification
- data collection
- plan development
- intervention implementation
- monitoring
- troubleshooting



Professional Development

- collaborative problem solving
- modeling of interventions
- coaching
- supporting class-wide interventions



The professional development component of an IST can be quite sizable because a full-time position, which is referred to as the IST teacher, is a key element of the services model. The IST teacher can present and model assessment practices and intervention strategies and coach teachers in effective applications in classrooms. The IST teacher also trains and supports other team members to provide assistance to teachers. The assumption behind this design capability is that in many situations teachers need extensive help when acquiring and applying new competencies to promote student learning and behavioral development.

IST OBSERVATIONS



“...the strategies that she [the IST teacher] shared with me . . . now I have adapted them to use with the whole class. It does not make the other students feel . . . you know, why am I getting pulled out? I mix them in with the other things that I am doing with the rest of the class. So I think, it goes really well.”

CLASSROOM TEACHER



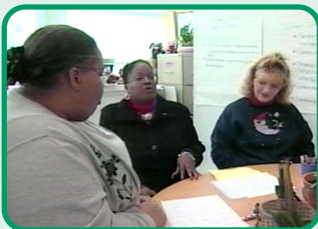
“The timeliness of response is outstanding. The special education process is very different. IST is a shorter span of time. We talked the next day (after the services request) and met within a week.”

CLASSROOM TEACHER



“The interesting thing about IST is that a team-modeled strategy starts being used in one room and then it goes out and down to the next room and before you know it, it spreads throughout the building.”

CLASSROOM TEACHER



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“Lots of times when people talk about IST, they are thinking about the children. But when I talk about IST, I think about teachers. IST is all about helping teachers to improve instruction for students.”

IST TEACHER



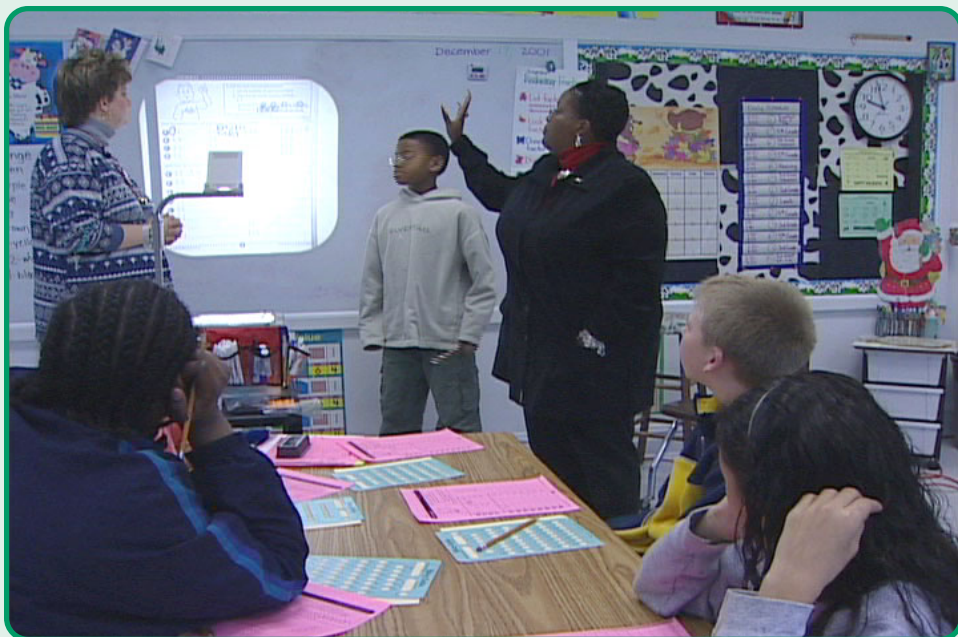
“The ultimate goal of IST is to make the classroom teacher’s job easier by making the teacher more effective . . . not by removing the student from the classroom.”

IST TRAINER



“. . . the IST teacher doesn’t just come in and pull the child out of class or just doesn’t go in and say try a few strategies and let me know how they work. The IST teacher has actually modeled some of those strategies if necessary. The classroom teacher is constantly in touch with the IST teacher and feels more comfortable being accountable for the child because she has more strategies at her fingertips.”

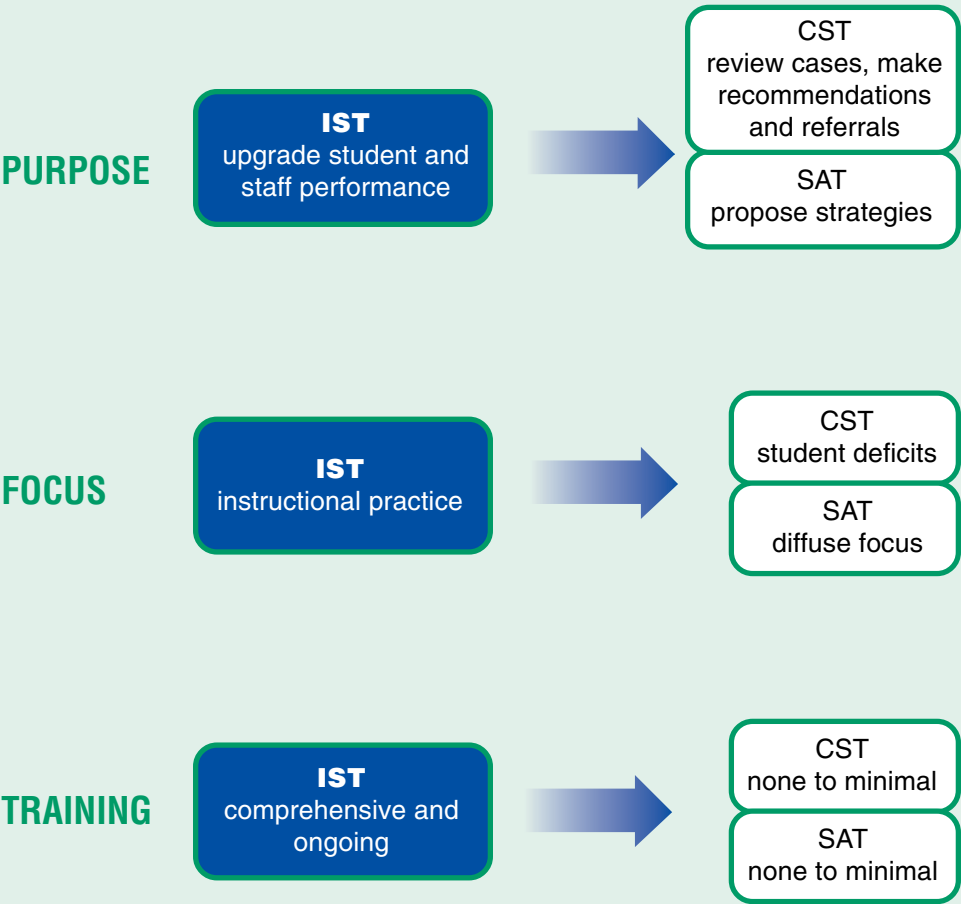
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL/TEAM MEMBER



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COMPARISONS

The IST is one type of an instructional consultation team. While it shares many similarities with other school-based teams, it differs significantly from them in purpose, focus, and training. Below are comparisons of the IST, Child Study Team (CST), and Student Assistance Team. (SAT).

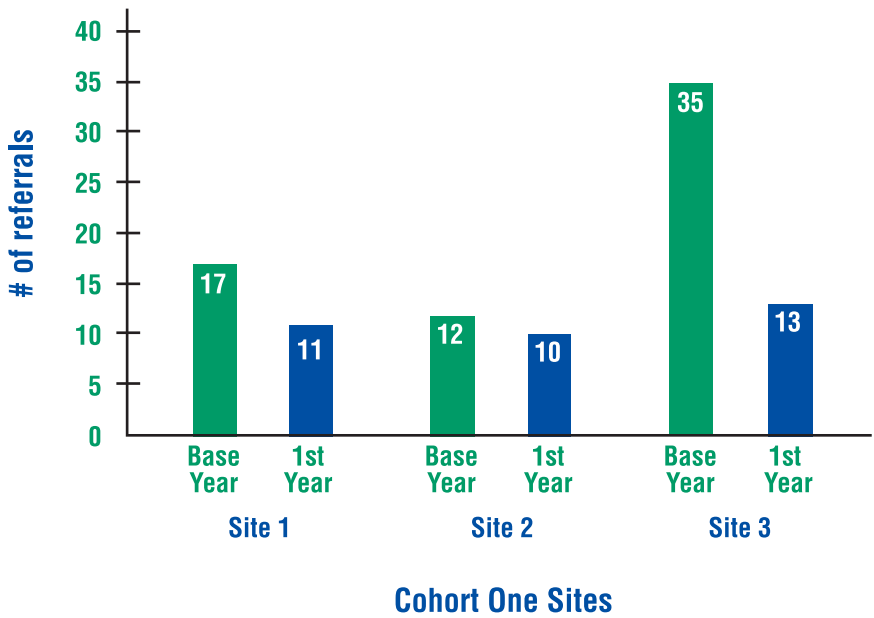


The most important comparison between an IST and other school-based teams is in assessment practices. While a SAT doesn't employ a systematic problem-solving process and a CST focuses on identifying student disabilities, an IST systematically follows procedures to assess instruction, the learning task and environment, and their match with student needs. The assumption behind IST assessments and related change efforts with students is that learning will accelerate when an instructional match is determined and adjustments are made to align instruction, task, and environment with student needs.

SERVICES IMPACT

Perhaps the greatest impetus to the IST Initiative by the VDOE was data reflecting the success of IST models in several other states. Of particular interest to the department were published reports from Pennsylvania that Instructional Support Teams (ISTs) reduced student retentions as much as 67 percent and referrals for multidisciplinary evaluations as much as 46 percent. In the 1990s, the Pennsylvania Department of Education implemented ISTs in approximately 2,000 schools across 500 school districts.

Similar to results in Pennsylvania and in the state of New York, first year findings (2000-2001) from the oldest or Cohort One sites (n=3) in Virginia identified reductions in multidisciplinary evaluation referrals ranging from 17 to 63 percent from the previous year. The average reduction in referrals for the three sites was 47 percent.



SITES



Model sites are distributed across Virginia. These sites provide information about a range of IST subjects to include:



IST Goals



Team Organization



Team Development



Case Management



Team Meetings



Instructional Consultation




Instructional Assessment



Site Validation

All sites are in elementary schools. As the student population of these schools varies from approximately 350 students to 850 students, visitors to model sites have an opportunity to study the development of ISTs in schools of different sizes. Also, classroom teachers, administrators, counselors, psychologists, reading teachers, and special education teachers are among the many different school professionals who serve on ISTs at the model sites. These team members are available at the sites to share the perspectives of their disciplines on the varied contributions provided by an IST.



For more information about IST sites
and other elements of the initiative contact:

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* With a few exceptions, the stills came from Cohort One sites featured in the video program entitled “IST in Virginia.”